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AUTHOR Leung, Jupian J.
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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to determine whether male and female college students differ in their aspirations. A related purpose was to explore the relationship between college students' emotional relationships with their parents and their parents' aspirations for them and also to determine if they felt emotionally closer to one parent than the other. The participants in the study were white male and female college students (n=139), ranging in age from 20 to 43 years of age. Among the survey findings were that females attributed more importance in their ratings of the aspirations "to have a good marriage," to be a good parent, and to be "loving" than did males. Female participants also rated "to be independent" and "to be self-reliant" as more important than males did, a finding which was viewed as contrary to expectations. Males and females rated their relationships with their mothers to be more positive than that with their fathers. Of the 15 aspirations students' mothers and fathers held for them, only three were common to both parents: to be ambitious, to be hard-working, and to be well-mannered. The study results indicated that mothers were the stronger agents of influence than fathers, as well as being emotionally closer to the students. This indicates that in helping college students to deal with the problems they encounter, one might consider enlisting more help from mothers than from fathers. Contains nine references. (GLR)

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Gender, Parent-Child Relationships, and Aspirations Among College Students

Jupian J. Leung*

University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

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*Correspondence regarding this article may be addressed to: Jupian J. Leung, College of Education and Human Services, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Oshkosh, WI 54901.

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Abstract

College males and females differed in rating a number of aspirations, and their emotional relationship with parents (especially mothers) correlated with their ratings of aspirations.

Gender, Parent-Child Relationships, and Aspirations Among College Students

The gender of children is an important variable that often determines the child-rearing and socialization experiences that they undergo both in and outside of the home (see, e.g., Hoffman, 1977; Block, 1984; Eccles & Hoffman, 1984). A large body of research has documented that in infancy (e.g., Parke & O'Leary, 1976), early childhood (e.g., Entwisle & Baker, 1983) and middle childhood and adolescence (e.g., Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982) children of the two sexes are treated differently by both parents and others.

From the moment when they are born in the hospital maternal ward, for example, boys and girls are treated in different ways: newborn boys are wrapped with blue while newborn girls are wrapped with pink blankets.

When they get older, children of different sexes are dressed differently. While boys are given shirts and pants girls are given blouses and skirts. Likewise, children are likely to be given different toys to play with depending on their gender: boys are given toy guns, soliders, fire-engines, trucks and building blocks while girls are much more likely to be given dolls and houses.

When children are hurt and cry, boys are told that "boys don't cry" but girls are never told that "girls don't cry." Playing outside the home, girls are likely to be given more adult supervision and, at the end of a school day, they are also more

likely to be picked up by adults. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely than girls to be asked by an adult to run an errand.

The gender of children also tends to elicit differential parental academic expectations. In a study with children in grades 1, 2, and 3, Entwisle and Baker (1983) examined parental expectations on children's performance in two academic subjects, namely, math and reading. They found that middle-class parents (mostly mothers) expected boys to get better marks in arithmetic and girls to get better marks in reading at each of the three grade levels. Further, they found this pattern of parental expectations to be identical to the pattern of expectations held by the children themselves. The lower-class parents' expectations were found to be similar to the middle-class parents except that they also expected girls to do better in arithmetic. These researchers suggested that young boys develop higher expectations for arithmetic performance than young girls apparently in response to these differential parental expectations.

In a study with students from 22 fifth- through eleventh-grade classrooms, Parsons, Adler, and Kaczala (1982) found that parents ascribed different importance to different school subjects, depending on the gender of the child. The researchers found that parents, especially fathers, were more likely to stress the importance of social science and humanities to their daughters and advanced mathematics and physical science to their sons. One might expect that these differential expectations on children and emphases of school subjects by parents as a function of the sex of the child will differentially influence their

behaviors toward their children. As a result, students' differential achievement in these school subjects may be a reflection of their internalization of differential parental expectations in them.

Evidence of differential achievement pressures for the two sexes was also obtained in a study reported by Block (1984). In that study, six independent samples of mothers (N=696) and five independent samples of fathers (N=548) whose children ranged in age from three to twenty years and who differed in ethnicity and socioeconomic status were asked to respond to the Block Child-Rearing Practices Report. The results from these data showed that both mothers and fathers tended to emphasize achievement and competition more for their sons than for their daughters.

In a national survey study conducted by Hoffman (1975; see also Hoffman, 1977) of over 1500 married women under 40 and one fourth of their husbands, it was found that more fathers and mothers indicated their concern for career or occupational success of their sons than their daughters. Both parents also indicated greater desire for their sons than daughters to be hardworking, ambitious, intelligent, highly educated, honest, responsible, independent, self-reliant, aggressive, and strong-willed. They indicated greater desire for their daughters than their sons to be kind, unselfish, loving, attractive, well-mannered, and to have a good marriage and be a good parent. Even though both parents indicated the same goal for their sons and daughters, when grown, to be happily married, the goal to be

successful and respected in work was expressed far more common for their sons than their daughters.

The above findings are thus consistent with the traditional socialization pattern centering on the instrumental-expressive dimension noted by Barry, Bacon, and Child (1957) and Johnson (1963).

Even though parents tend to have different emphasis on the expectations and aspirations for their children, depending on the gender of the latter (i.e., instrumental or achievement-oriented values for sons and expressive or relationship-oriented values for daughters), the extent to which children themselves differ in these aspirations because they differ in gender remains to be documented.

The major purpose of the present study is therefore to determine if male and female college students differ in their aspirations. College students were the subjects of the present study because they can be expected to be more cognitively mature and are also more aware of their aspirations than students of younger ages. Given that research shows that parents have differential expectations and aspirations for sons and daughters and treat them differently, one might expect that male and female college students would have differential aspirations for themselves as a result of differential parental treatment. More specifically, the major purpose of the present study was to determine if there were sex differences in a selected list of aspirations (to be described in the Method section below) among college students. Following the findings of Hoffman (1977, 1975)

and Block (1984), it was hypothesized that instrumental or achievement-oriented values/aspirations would be more salient for males while expressive or relationship-oriented values/aspirations would be more salient for females.

A related purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between college students' emotional relationship with their parents and their aspirations and also to determine if they felt emotionally closer to one parent (e.g., the mother) than the other. These are important issues because the findings could have significant implications for educational practices.

Method

Participants. The participants in the present study were male and female students at a state university located in an eastern central Wisconsin city of about 50,000. All participants were taking a junior-level education course and were recruited from their classrooms by the investigator on a voluntary basis. A total of 139 students volunteered to participate in the study. All of these participants were white and most were college juniors or seniors.

Material. All participants anonymously completed a questionnaire administered by the investigator in their classrooms. The questionnaire asked the participants to indicate their date of birth and gender and to indicate how important each of 15 values/aspirations was to them using a response scale that ranged from 1 (very unimporotant) to 7 (very important). The 15 values/aspirations are: (1) to be ambitious; (2) to have a good job; (3) to have a good marriage; (4) to be a good parent; (5) to

be hard-working; (6) to be independent; (7) to be loving; (8) to be respected in my work; (9) to be self-reliant; (10) to be strong-willed; (11) to be successful in my work; (12) to be unselfish; (13) to do well in school; (14) to be well-educated; and (15) to be well-mannered. These 15 values/aspirations were chosen to represent a broad range of instrumental or achievement-oriented versus expressive or relationship-oriented values/aspirations.

In addition, participants were asked to rate their emotional relationship with their fathers and also their mothers using a scale from 1 (very distant) to 7 (very close).

Procedure. Participants who volunteered to participate in this study were given a copy of the questionnaire to complete anonymously in their classrooms towards the end of a class. It was emphasized to the participants that the questionnaire aimed to obtain their personal feelings and therefore there were no right or wrong answers. They were told that they were always free to choose whether or not to respond to a particular statement. The investigator was available to clarify questions that the participants might have and he debriefed the participants concerning the purpose of the study after they all completed the questionnaire.

Results

The age of the 139 participants ranged from 20 to 43 years. In order to make the age variable more homogeneous and at the same time to have a reasonable sample size, it was decided that only participants between the age of 20 and 24 would be included

in subsequent data analyses. This decision was made because it was felt that the aspirations might be different for older as compared to younger students. This resulted in 120 participants, specifically 51 males and 69 females. These 120 participants were distributed by age as follows: age 20: 27, age 21: 46, age 22: 26, age 23: 10, and age 24: 11.

To determine gender differences in participants' rating of the importance of the 15 aspirations, a Hotelling's T-squared test was conducted. The results showed a significant difference between the two genders in their rating of the importance of the 15 aspirations, $F(15, 103) = 1.99$, $p < .05$. Results from the univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the two genders differed specifically in the following five aspirations, with females ascribing more importance to each than males ($p < .05$): to have a good marriage, to be a good parent, to be independent, to be loving, and to be self-reliant. The mean and standard deviation for each of the aspirations for the two sexes are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

To determine if participants' gender was related to their rating of the aspirations, point-biserial correlations were computed and the results are shown in the last two columns in Table 1.

As can be seen from the last two columns in Table 1, eight significant correlations were found between participants' gender

and their rating of the aspirations. These eight significant correlations are: to have a good marriage, to be a good parent, to be independent, to be loving, to be self-reliant, to be unselfish, to do well in school, and to be well-educated, with females rating these aspirations more important than males.

To determine if participants' emotional relationship with their parents was related to their rating of the aspirations, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed for the entire group of participants as well as for the males and the females separately. The results are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

As can be seen from Table 2, the patterns of correlation between participants' rating of their aspirations and their emotional relationship with their mothers are noticeably different from those with their fathers. For this group of male and female college students (see columns 1 and 2), one sees more significant correlations between the rating of their aspirations and their emotional relationship with their mothers (9) than with their fathers (4). Further, among these significant correlations, only two were common to both parents, namely, to be ambitious and to be hard-working. The other significant correlations were unique to each parent.

For the sons (see columns 3 and 4 of Table 2), there were two significant correlations between their emotional relationship with their father and their rating of the aspirations (to be a

good parent, to be hard-working) but only one significant correlation between their emotional relationship with their mother and their rating of the aspirations (to be ambitious).

For the daughters (see columns 5 and 6 of Table 2), there are four significant correlations between their emotional relationship with their father and their rating of the aspirations (to be ambitious, to be hard-working, to be well-educated, and to be well-mannered) but seven significant correlations between their emotional relationship with their mother and their rating of the aspirations (to be ambitious, to have a good job, to be hard-working, to be respected in my work, to be self-reliant, to do well in school, and to be well-mannered). Among these 11 significant correlations, only three were common to both fathers and mothers (to be ambitious, to be hard-working, and to be well-mannered). The others were unique to the father or the mother.

Participants' ratings of their emotional relationship with their fathers and with their mothers were also compared. For the entire group of males and females as well as for the males and the females separately, participants' rating of their emotional relationship with their mothers was found to be significantly more positive (i.e., closer) than that of their fathers. For the entire group of participants, the means for fathers and mothers are 5.13 and 6.15, respectively, $t(118) = -6.01$, $p < .001$. (The standard deviations were 1.67 and 1.02, respectively.) For the males alone, the means for fathers and mothers were 5.04 and 6.12, respectively, $t(49) = -4.56$, $p < .001$. (The standard

deviations were 1.63 and .90, respectively.) For the females alone, the means for fathers and mothers were 5.19 and 6.17, respectively, $t(68) = -4.10$, $p < .001$. (The standard deviations were 1.70 and 1.11, respectively.)

Discussion

It is hardly surprising to note that females attributed more importance in their ratings of "to have a good marriage, to be a good parent, and to be loving" given that these so called "relationship-oriented" or "expressive" values or aspirations are traditionally emphasized more for females than males. These findings are thus consistent with those of Hoffman (1977) who found that parents tend to emphasize these values more for their daughters than sons. The finding that female participants also rated "to be independent" and "to be self-reliant" more important than males is contrary to what one might expect given that these are considered to be "instrumental" or "achievement-oriented" values that have been traditionally emphasized more for males. This finding is less a surprise, however, when considering that all the females in the present study were college students. This very fact suggest that they were at least achievement-oriented enough to attend college. The above findings therefore may reflect the heightened consciousness on the part of females of the importance of values such as to be independent and self-reliant that are necessary for survival in a competitive and achievement- and economically-oriented world. These findings also seem to suggest that college females may be more adaptive and subject to more achievement pressures than males given the

greater importance that they attributed to these aspirations than their male counterparts.

The findings on the correlations between participants' gender and their rating of the aspirations seem to mirror the gender differences justed described. Thus, referring to Table 1, females were found to rate "to have a good marriage," "to be a good parent," "to be independent," "to be loving," and "to be self-reliant" more important than males. Additionally, they were found to rate "to be hard-working," "to do well in school," and "to be well-educated" more important than males. The strength of these latter three correlations was not very strong, however. These correlational findings thus may be considered to be generally consistent with our earlier findings on sex differences in aspirations (which were based on ANOVA rather than correlation), and they thus reinforce these earlier findings on sex differences.

As can be seen from Table 2, for the males and females as a group (see first 2 columns), there were nine significant correlations with the mother and only four with the father. These suggest that for the males and females as a group, the mother seems to play a more important role than the father in the aspirations of their children.

It should be recalled that for the females as a group (see columns 5 and 6 of Table 2) eleven significant correlations were found. Among these eleven correlations, only three were common to both fathers and mothers (namely, to be ambitious, to be hard-working, and to be well-mannered). Of the remaining eight

correlations, only one was unique to the father (to be well-educated) but four were unique to the mother (to have a good job, to be respected in my work, to be self-reliant, and to do well in school). These differential correlations suggest that the father and the mother play somewhat different roles when it comes to the specific aspirations of the daughter. Because all these significant correlations occur in achievement-related values/aspirations, they seem to suggest that both fathers and mothers play an important role in the development of achievement-related values/aspirations in females. Further, because four significant correlations occur uniquely with the mother and only one with the father, it appears that the mother plays a relatively more important role than the father in the aspirations of daughters.

As noted earlier, for the males as a group (see columns 3 and 4 of Table 2) there were two significant correlations between son's rating of their relationship with their father and their rating of their aspirations (to be a good parent, to be hard-working) but only one significant correlation between their rating of their relationship with their mother and the rating of their aspirations (to be ambitious). These three significant correlations, two unique to the father and one unique to the mother, seem to indicate that the father plays a relatively more important and somewhat different role than the mother in the aspirations of sons.

Given that females were found to value "to have a good marriage," "to be a good parent," and "to be loving" more than

males, and given that both male and female college students were found to feel emotionally closer to their mothers than fathers, two implications may be delineated. The first implication is that males need to place greater value on being a good parent and being loving. This, hopefully, may help them develop a more positive emotional relationship with their children when they become fathers. The second implication is that educators need to examine strategies that might help males not only to value but also develop skills to be a good parent and to be loving in order to enhance their personal qualities.

Further, the greater number of correlations between students' ratings of their aspirations and their emotional relationship with their mother than father suggest that the mother is a stronger agent of influence than the father. This, along with the finding that both male and female college students feel emotionally closer to their mother than father, suggests a third implication. This implication is that in counseling or otherwise helping college students to deal with the problems they encounter, one might consider enlisting more help from mothers than fathers.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Point-Biserial Correlations Between Students' Gender and Their Ratings of 15 Aspirations

	Mean		SD		
	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Corr.
1. To be ambitious	5.70	5.80	1.18	1.02	.03
2. To have a good job	5.96	6.13	.99	.84	.11
3. to have a good marriage	6.46	6.78	.95	.57	.23**
4. To be a good parent	6.72	6.91	.45	.28	.23**
5. To be hard-working	6.14	6.29	.90	.75	.13
6. To be independent	5.52	5.90	1.15	.79	.19*
7. To be loving	6.40	6.71	.67	.60	.25**
8. To be respected in my work	6.14	6.36	.90	.95	.12
9. To be self-reliant	5.52	5.97	1.05	.89	.23**
10. To be strong-willed	5.32	5.41	1.53	1.06	.03
11. To be successful in my work	6.44	6.48	.81	.66	.03
12. To be unselfish	5.90	6.19	1.02	.86	.15*
13. To do well in school	5.86	6.16	.95	.72	.18*
14. To be well-educated	6.00	6.29	.99	.84	.16*
15. To be well-mannered	6.06	5.96	.94	.96	-.05

Note.
Means and standard deviations based on n=50 for males and n=69 for females.
Correlations based on N = 119 or 120.
Sex coded 1 = male and 2 = female in correlations.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Between Students' Perceived Relationship With Fathers and Mothers and Their Rating of 15 Aspirations

	Males & Females[a]		Males[b]		Females[c]	
	Dad	Mom	Dad	Mom	Dad	Mom
1. To be ambitious	.21**	.26**	.09	.26*	.30**	.26*
2. To have a good job	.13	.19*	.06	-.03	.18	.35***
3. to have a good marriage	.03	.10	.01	.06	.03	.15
4. To be a good parent	.19*	.05	.27*	.03	.10	.10
5. To be hard-working	.24**	.22**	.26*	.23	.21*	.22*
6. To be independent	-.14	.13	-.20	.08	-.12	.19
7. To be loving	-.02	.11	.11	.16	-.15	.08
8. To be respected in my work	.06	.27***	-.08	.16	.14	.33**
9. To be self-reliant	.00	.21**	-.02	-.03	.00	.38***
10. To be strong-willed	.02	.00	-.02	-.08	.05	.08
11. To be successful in my work	.02	.15*	-.21	.17	.20	.17
12. To be unselfish	.03	.17*	-.12	.17	.14	.16
13. To do well in school	.05	.19*	.01	.07	.08	.30**
14. To be well-educated	.22**	.09	.07	.07	.34**	.10
15. To be well-mannered	.10	.24**	-.18	.12	.28**	.31**

Note.
a: N = 118, 119, or 120.
b: n = 49, 50, or 51.
c: n = 69.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.